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C O N F I D E N T I A L HANOI 000883

SIPDIS
STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, PM/RSAT, AND PM/PPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/10/23
TAGS: PREL KPKO MARR VM
SUBJECT: Vietnam's Long Term View on PKO Participation

CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, Deputy Chief of Mission; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) The DCM used a working lunch with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for International Organizations Le Hoai Trung on October 20 to discuss current GVN thinking on Vietnam participating in global peacekeeping operations. Trung offered that following a two-year review directed by the Prime Minister, the government recommended that Vietnam undertake the necessary steps to participate in PKO operations. However, senior leaders rejected the recommendation for the time being, saying the government must first undertake a "comprehensive, detailed review of all related issues," including but not limited to how Vietnam would deal with troops dying in PKO operations, the logistics of training, deploying and maintaining troops abroad, and a public relations campaign to prepare the public "which still has very fresh memories of war" about the possibility of Vietnamese soldiers dying overseas. Vietnam's constitution is also an issue: while it does not prohibit PKO deployments, it does not permit them either. Trung said GVN leaders do not question the capabilities of Vietnamese troops, which can make a particularly contribution in field hospitals and demining. Once Vietnamese leaders make the political decision to participate in PKO operations, Vietnamese troops will require assistance from countries like the U.S. in areas such as English language and command/control issues in a multinational force. Tellingly, when pressed on the timing, in a clear reference to the January 2011 Party Congress, Trung said not much can be done during an "election year." Asked if work on the "package" continued so that it could be launched soon after the Congress, Trung laughed in mock horror saying seriously "no one wants to seen to as the one pushing something like this at a sensitive time."

¶2. (C) Comment: Trung is well connected, senior, very engaged on these issues and unusually candid. Though the GVN will continue to send observers and may even participate in tabletop exercises, Trung's assessment of the timing of Vietnam's participation in PKO is likely an accurate one. While the bureaucratic machinery may move slowly on PKO, post is confident that Vietnam will continue to grow into a more participatory role in regional and international military exercises and operations over time. End comment.

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